

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A content usage control apparatus for controlling use of a content under a predetermined condition, comprising:

acquisition means for acquiring identification information of another apparatus or user requesting use of a content;

registration means for registering the identification information acquired from the other apparatus or the user; and

usage control means for, in response to the request for use of the content issued by the other apparatus or the user, determining whether the use of the content is allowed on the basis of whether the identification information of the other apparatus or the user is already registered.

2. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the registration means performs registration in response to a request issued by another apparatus or user.

3. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the registration means performs new registration only when the current number of registrations

is smaller than a predetermined maximum allowable number of registrations.

4. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein

the registration means stores, together with identification information of another apparatus or user, an invalidation flag for controlling provision of a service to a client whose identification information is already registered; and

the usage control means limits the use of the content by the other apparatus or the user, if the invalidation flag associated with the other apparatus or the user is set.

5. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising change limitation means for limiting changing, performed by the registration means, of registered information.

6. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the change limitation means limits, to a predetermined value, the number of times already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user.

7. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the change limitation means limits the frequency at which already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user.

8. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 5, wherein when already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user, the change limitation means requests the other apparatus or the user to perform a particular operation.

9. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 5, wherein when already registered identification information is replaced, the change limitation means requests submission of change permission information from another apparatus or a manager.

10. A content usage control apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the change limitation means charges depending on the maximum allowable number of times already registered identification information is changed.

11. A content usage control apparatus according to

claim 5, wherein when the limitation on registration is changed, the change limitation means requests submission of change permission information from another apparatus or a particular manager.

12. A content usage control method for controlling use of a content under a predetermined condition, comprising the steps of:

acquiring identification information of another apparatus or user requesting use of a content;

registering the identification information acquired from the other apparatus or the user; and

in response to the request for use of the content issued by the other apparatus or the user, determining whether the use of the content is allowed on the basis of whether the identification information of the other apparatus or the user is already registered.

13. A content usage control method according to claim 12, wherein in the registration step, registration is performed in response to a request issued by another apparatus or user.

14. A content usage control method according to claim 12, wherein in the registration step, new registration is

performed only when the current number of registrations is smaller than a predetermined maximum allowable number of registrations.

15. A content usage control method according to claim 12, wherein in the registration step, an invalidation flag for controlling provision of a service to a client whose identification information is already registered is stored together with identification information of another apparatus or user; and

in the usage limiting step, the use of the content by the other apparatus or the user is limited, if the invalidation flag associated with the other apparatus or the user is set.

16. A content usage control method according to claim 12, further comprising the step of limiting changing, performed by the registration means, of registered information.

17. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein in the step of limiting changing of registered information, the number of times already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user is limited to a

predetermined value.

18. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein in the step of limiting changing of registered information, the frequency at which already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user is limited.

19. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein the step of limiting changing of registered information includes the step of, when already registered identification information is replaced with identification information of another apparatus or user, requesting the other apparatus or the user to perform a particular operation.

20. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein the step of limiting changing of registered information includes the step of, when already registered identification information is replaced, requesting submission of change permission information from another apparatus or a manager.

21. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein the step of limiting changing of registered

information includes the step of charging depending on the maximum allowable number of times already registered identification information is changed.

22. A content usage control method according to claim 16, wherein the step of limiting changing of registered information includes the step of, when the limitation on registration is changed, requesting submission of change permission information from another apparatus or a particular manager.

23. A computer program described in a computer-readable format, for causing a computer system to execute a process of controlling use of a content under a predetermined condition, the process comprising the steps of:

acquiring identification information of another apparatus or user requesting use of a content;

registering the identification information acquired from the other apparatus or the user; and

in response to the request for use of the content issued by the other apparatus or the user, determining whether the use of the content is allowed on the basis of whether the identification information of the other apparatus or the user is already registered.